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UNCLAS HARARE 001614

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/PDPA FOR DALTON, MITCHELL AND SIMS  
NSC FOR JENDAYI FRAZER  
LONDON FOR GURNEY  
PARIS FOR NEARY  
NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION MUGABE/TAYLOR HOLD POLITICAL  
SPOTLIGHT; HARARE

11. Under headline "Africa must now bear on Mugabe to step down" the independent daily "The Daily News" dedicated its August 14 editorial to calling on African leaders to "use their influence" to encourage Robert Mugabe, blamed for the "deepening political and economic anarchy" in the country, to resign from the presidency of Zimbabwe as a harbinger to the restoration of "normality" and "democracy" to Zimbabwe. Hailing Charles Taylor's resignation from the presidency of Liberia and his departure into exile after "he obviously realized that Liberia is bigger than Taylor," the editorial encouraged African leaders to "use their influence to ensure that Mugabe is not forced to go the (Charles) Taylor route." Excerpts:

12. "The change of the guard in Liberia, where Charles Taylor resigned as president on Monday and flew to Nigeria for political asylum, could provide useful lessons for troubled Zimbabwe, where planned talks between the government and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) could fail to rescue the country from total collapse. While Liberia has been torn apart by civil war in the past 20 years, Zimbabwe is gripped by deepening political and economic anarchy after President Robert Mugabe presided over the virtual destruction of the economy. Taylor, for all his sins of the past, should be commended for seeing the light and stepping aside so that peace could return to the shattered land. He obviously realized that Liberia is bigger than Taylor. . . In Zimbabwe, Mugabe still clings to power despite mounting public pressure for him to step down in the midst of a rapidly worsening economic crisis created by his government's poor policies. Mugabe, accused locally and internationally of gross human rights abuses, would need immunity if he were to step down. . . If Mugabe does not quit now, how long can he precariously cling to power and at what cost to the tottering and anguished nation. . . ? Although Mugabe's colleagues in the Southern African region have been working behind the scenes to try to put things right, much more needs to be done at that level to make clear to the President that there can never be normality until democracy is restored to Zimbabwe. The African leaders could use their influence to ensure that Mugabe is not forced to go the Taylor route. Whether or not an African country would be prepared to offer him asylum would depend largely on the modalities and timing of his departure."

WHITEHEAD